

**NORTHWEST RANKIN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-ATHLETE NAMED
GATORADE MISSISSIPPI SOFTBALL PLAYER OF THE YEAR**

CHICAGO (June 9, 2023) — In its 38th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade today announced **Jolie Hays** of **Northwest Rankin High School** is the **2022-23 Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year**. Hays is the second Gatorade Mississippi Softball Player of the Year to be chosen from Northwest Rankin High School.

The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the field, distinguishes Hays as Mississippi's best high school softball player. Now a finalist for the prestigious Gatorade National Softball Player of the Year award to be announced in June, Hays joins an elite alumni association of state award-winners in 12 sports, including Jordyn Bahl (2020-21, Papillion-La Vista High School, Neb.), Megan Faraimo (2017-18, Cathedral Catholic High School, Calif.), Rachel Garcia (2014-15, Highland High School, Calif.) and Cat Osterman (2000-01, Cypress Springs High School, Texas).

The 5-foot-4 junior left-handed pitcher and outfielder led the Cougars (34-4) to the 6A state championship this past season. Hays posted a record of 20-2 with a 1.03 ERA and 213 strikeouts in 157 innings. The state's 6A Miss Softball, she also batted .398 with 18 RBI and 27 runs scored.

Hays has volunteered locally at Little Dreamers Daycare center. In addition, she's donated her time to multiple community service initiatives through her church youth group, including fundraising for those impacted by the tornado in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, earlier this year. "Jolie Hays is a dominant pitcher," said DeSoto High School head coach Harley Smith. "Her accuracy, speed, ability to command the zone and overall composure—all while competing in the largest district—was very impressive this year."

Hays has maintained a 4.0 GPA in the classroom. She has made a verbal commitment to play softball on scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi beginning in the fall of 2024.

The [Gatorade Player of the Year](#) program annually recognizes one winner in the District of Columbia and each of the 50 states that sanction high school football, girls volleyball, boys and girls cross country, boys and girls basketball, boys and girls soccer, baseball, softball, and boys and girls track & field, and awards one National Player of the Year in each sport. The selection process is administered by the Gatorade Player of the Year Selection Committee, which leverages experts including coaches, scouts, media and others as sources to help evaluate and determine the state winners in each sport.

Hays joins recent Gatorade Mississippi Softball Players of the Year Tenly Grisham (2021-22, Neshoba Central High School), Paige Kilgore (2020-21 & 2019-20, Houston High School), and Aspen Wesley (2018-19, Neshoba Central High School), among the state's list of former award winners.

Being a Gatorade Player of the Year means paying it forward for the next generation. Through Gatorade's Play it Forward initiative, every Player of the Year receives a grant to give to one of Gatorade's social impact partners, supporting Gatorade's ambition to fuel the future of sport. To date, Gatorade Player of the Year winners' grants have totaled more than \$3.5 million across more than 1,300 organizations.

For nearly 40 years, Gatorade has honored high school athletes at the top of their game as teammates, supporting their communities and achieving academic success. From CEOs and coaches to star athletes and community leaders, Gatorade Player of the Year winners showcase the power of sport.

To learn more about the Gatorade Player of the Year program, check out past winners or to nominate student-athletes, visit playeroftheyear.gatorade.com or follow us on social media on Facebook at facebook.com/GatoradePOY, Instagram at instagram.com/Gatorade and Twitter at twitter.com/Gatorade.

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